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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS

Statement submitted by American Association of University Women, Associated Country Women of the World, Bahá'í International Community, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Defence for Children International, Dominican Leadership Conference, Franciscans International, International Council of Jewish Women, International Federation of University Women, International Lactation Consultant Association, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice della Salesiane di Don Bosco, Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children, League of Women Voters of the United States, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Pan Pacific and South-East Asia Women's Association, Partnership for Global Justice, Salesian Missions, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Sisters of Charity Federation, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, Soroptimist International, SOS Kinderdorf International, Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund, VIVAT International, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, World Youth Alliance, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

Promises Made to Girls

The Beijing Platform for Action, Section L, pledges to eliminate all forms of discrimination against girls, specifically addressing violence, education, economic exploitation and harmful cultural attitudes and practices. It also promises to strengthen families and to promote girls' awareness and participation in their own lives and in their societies. Furthermore, it calls attention to the need to overcome the gender stereotypes that exist in many societies and create enabling environments in which girls can develop their full potential. Finally, it recognizes that the advancement of women is not sustainable without attention to the rights of girls.

Why then after more than a decade of promises, do girls remain powerless, invisible and neglected throughout their life-cycle? Girls are still repeatedly denied their political, economic, social and cultural rights and subjected to culturally and legally sanctioned behaviors that present a grave risk to their physical, psychological, spiritual and social-emotional development.

The Root Causes

Cultural norms, gender roles and gender stereotypes are at the root of gender inequality that privileges men and boys and continues to burden women and girls. Social science research indicates that: (a) gender role development is socially constructed and learned from birth; (b) strict enforcement of prevailing gender-specific attributes and socialization can have a deleterious influence on child development whereby young girls and boys are forced into strict gender roles; and (c) prevailing gender stereotypes and less valued social roles associated with the more marginalized status of women continue to discriminate and heighten the vulnerability of the girl child. Research has also demonstrated the profound influences exerted by, inter alia, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, rural/urban residence, migrant/refugee status and disability on the inequalities experienced by girls and women.

Cultural norms, social roles, and the gender stereotypes associated with them determine household roles and as a result, girls and women bear a disproportionate share of care giving responsibilities. The consequences for girls include: (a) denial of their right to the education necessary to prepare them for the responsibilities of full participation in society and in the family; (b) limited time for play and other creative pursuits so essential to the personal development of children; limited opportunity to develop peer relationships and leadership skills; and (c) no chance to take care of themselves.

Girls and Care Giving in the Context of HIV/AIDS

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has compounded the care giving responsibilities of women and girls. In households affected by HIV/AIDS and burdened by poverty, girls are often removed from school to decrease expenses and to increase care giving resources. Where children provide care for parents,

* Issued without formal editing.

two-thirds of the care givers are girls. In many cases, older daughters assume the full responsibility for the household and do so at the expense of their own developmentally appropriate needs and pursuits. Social science research on the "*parentified child*" indicates that these girls are at increased risk for adverse health and developmental outcomes.

Research also shows that children who lose their parents to AIDS suffer greater psychological distress than children who are orphaned by other causes. In some cases, girl care givers also suffer from HIV/AIDS. Girls are disproportionately impacted by the international community's failure to meet health care commitments and the social stigma of HIV/AIDS further magnifies the low status for girl care givers.

The fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women offers a unique opportunity for Member States to review progress, improve policies and accelerate programmes designed to fulfill previous promises and to ensure all girls the full enjoyment of their human rights.

Recommendations

In order to ensure the human rights of girls and to address gender inequality in care giving, particularly in the context of HIV/AIDS, we urge Governments to:

(1) *Empower girls through mainstream campaigns to transform attitudes, norms and gender stereotypes.* States must seek to eliminate prejudices and customary practices which are based on the notion of girls' inferiority. We urge the launch of a worldwide campaign to encourage positive attitudes and behavior to combat gender inequality and eliminate stereotypes that prevent full partnership in the household and in the public sphere. Campaigns focused on transforming attitudes must target the media and address the role of men and boys in establishing gender equality.

(2) *Promote the competence and resilience of girls through education and training.* Effective strategies to achieve gender equality must include the social, political and economic empowerment of girls through education programmes and job training to prepare them for their critical roles in their families and communities. Education is the right of every girl and the key to transforming her life and the life of her community.

(3) *Promote the participation, visibility, and empowerment of girls.* Create safe spaces for girls to speak, to voice their concerns and to obtain assistance. The skills, ideas and energy of all girls, especially those from disadvantaged groups, are vital for the full attainment of gender equality.

(4) *Provide resources and funding for gender equality and empowerment of girls.* States must develop gender-responsive budgeting that explicitly allocates monies for: (a) girls' health programs, including adolescent and HIV/AIDS issues; (b) programs that offer opportunities to girls and end the trafficking of girls for labour and sexual exploitation; (c) programs to end all forms of violence against the girl child, including genital cutting, incest, prenatal sex selection and infanticide; and (d) education at all levels.

(5) *Identify and address the needs of girls heading households and children without parental care, including in the context of the HIV/AIDS.* Address girls' needs in an integrated way, inter alia, providing access to financial resources, quality health care, and psychosocial support and protecting girls' land ownership rights. Develop policies and programmes for children who are orphaned by AIDS by supporting family care giving as a first resort and institutional care as a last resort. Share information about best practices which address the needs of families affected by HIV/AIDS. Take measures to increase men and boys' responsibility for home-based care in order to address the disproportionate burden borne by girls in caring for family members.

(6) *Collect, analyze and disseminate data on children, disaggregated by sex, age, socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity.* Institute effective and transparent measurement of previously set goals and targets related to girls, inter alia, the Convention on the Rights of the Child; Beijing Platform for Action, Section L; Millennium Development Goals; Education for All; A World Fit for Children, Plan of Action; and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Institutionalizing the collection of disaggregated data in critical sectors in, inter alia, health, education, labor and protection will help create an inclusive gender perspective for the planning, implementation and monitoring of government programs and for benchmarking across nations and communities.

(7) *Strengthen the role of civil society and of organizations for girls' participation and empowerment.* Tackling gender stereotypes, empowering girls to participate more fully in their families and communities, expanding educational and training opportunities for girls, and increasing research and expanding data collection and dissemination will require the active involvement of civil society groups. We encourage the secretariat and Governments to welcome the active participation of their civil society partners. These organizations occupy a central place in society and can support efforts to ensure women's and girls' rights and their full participation in the development of their communities.

Conclusion

The State has a major role to play in protecting everyone's human rights. The human rights of the girl child cannot and should not be overlooked in the development of a healthy society.